

A TRIBUTE TO THE LIFE OF
ALBERT "AL" POMBO

HON. JIM COSTA

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 2, 2010

Mr. COSTA. Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Albert "Al" Pombo who passed away on November 19, 2010. Al Pombo was an extraordinary man and a favorite of racing fans throughout California, but also a personal hero of mine. I ask that portions of an article published by The Fresno Bee be entered into the RECORD.

Al kissed bumpers and babies in a hard-charging auto racing career in the Central Valley that often angered competitors while captivating fans, young and old, died Friday at Veterans Hospital in Fresno. He was 85.

"He was just talented, very good—he was the best," another former Valley racer, Dan Green, said Saturday of Mr. Pombo, who launched his career at Merced Speedway in the jalopy class in 1948, went on to compete in dirt cars, hardtops, sprint cars and super modifieds and won more than 500 main events, seven NASCAR supermodified titles and numerous championships at short tracks throughout California before he retired in 1971.

He actually came out of retirement for one final race, driving Al Brazil's circle No. 3 sprint car at Clovis Speedway in 1976. "They broke the mold when they made him," Kings Speedway promoter Dave Swindell once said of Mr. Pombo, the state's top hardtop racer in the 1960s. Kenny Takeuchi, a former announcer at Kearney Bowl and other tracks across the state, once said: "He was dedicated to the sport. Whether it's God-given or not, he had real driving talent and competition never faded him. He was also good on dirt or pavement, and that's rare to find today." Mr. Pombo was particularly dedicated to the Valley. "He had the ability to go back East," Green said, "but he never did really care about going on to Indy and the big time. He was a local guy and very few people beat him."

Mr. Pombo fancied the tight, quarter-mile oval at the old Kearney Bowl, where his duels with Marshall Sargent riveted the Valley racing audience in the 1950s and '60s and helped pump racing blood back into the hearts of those still mourning the 1955 Indianapolis 500 loss of Fresno icon Billy Vukovich Sr.

It was at Kearney Bowl—once Fresno Airport Speedway, and then Italian Park Speedway—where Vukovich forged his career from 1936-47 behind the wheel of the little red "Old Ironsides" before crowds approaching 20,000 that routinely arrived for Sunday night midgets. It was primarily there and at Clovis Speedway that Mr. Pombo developed a Valley fan following arguably only exceeded by Vukovich in the region's history of auto racing.

Mr. Pombo's popularity hardly faded deep into his retirement as it was common to see him in recent years smooching babies and being swarmed by kids and adults at autograph sessions at Valley tracks. He couldn't be torn away from his passion, even though he used a wheelchair in his final months. He made his last appearance, signing his hats, T-shirts and pictures per usual, Oct. 22-23 at the Trophy Cup at Tulare's Thunderbowl

Raceway. Mr. Pombo was taken there by longtime friend Paul Reiter, his designated driver for years. And, to the end, Reiter witnessed many who bowed to the icon. "People from way back would tell their kids to shake this man's hands, the legend of all time," said Reiter, a former soda vendor at Kearney Bowl. "People would tell him, 'You're the greatest driver . . . you gave us so many nights of thrills . . . I met my wife at the track and watched your whole career.'"

Most memorable were the duels with Sargent that found metal to metal and occasional fist to fist. So intense was their rivalry, bleacher brawling was common among fans fighting in defense of one or the other racers. And so prominent in Valley racing annals, a tribute is still paid in the form of the annual Pombo-Sargent Classic at Kings Speedway. "We were always the best friends in the world," once said Pombo, also name-sake of the Al Pombo Classic that continues at Madera Speedway. "But when the green flag dropped, we'd come out fighting. Sometimes, we'd mix it up a bit, but we'd always end up in the bar partying."

Daughter of Al Pombo's son, Tony, she said her grandfather hadn't walked since falling and breaking his hip in late June. Since, he had remained at Fresno's Veterans Hospital. And it was there that Reiter would pick him up, drive him to tracks in Tulare, Chowchilla, Madera and Hanford, and return him the same night, as late as 2 a.m. "He loved kids, he loved people, he loved everybody," Reiter said. "You couldn't ask for a better guy. He was my hero."

Al was born in the Azores on June 3, 1925. He is preceded in death by his wife Pat, and children Diana, David, and Albert Jr. Al is survived by his children, Alisa and Larry McDonald, Patty Micheli, Debbie Pombo, Tony and Susan Pombo, Pat Ruch, and fifteen grandchildren and eleven great-grandchildren.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in remembering the life of this remarkable man, and one of my personal heroes, as we offer our condolences to his family and celebrate his memory and service to our community and California.

HONORING DR. NORMAN WALL

HON. ALAN GRAYSON

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 2, 2010

Mr. GRAYSON. Madam Speaker, I rise today to offer my congratulations on Dr. Norman Wall being honored for his many contributions to the foundation of the Sheba Medical Center in Tel Hashomer, Israel and his continued involvement in medical advancements both in the United States and in Israel.

He used his role as a medical officer in the U.S. Army during World War II to help establish what is now Israel's largest hospital and research center. Dr. Wall has not stopped giving back to the community both here and abroad. Since his move to Orlando in 1995, he has made a great impact on the Florida Hospital community.

I greatly appreciate his service in the U.S. Army and his many contributions in the field of medicine. Dr. Wall has a true grasp of the

concept of tikkun olam and I am inspired by his commitment to making the world a better place.

HONORING SUMMER KENNEDY

HON. PATRICK J. KENNEDY

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 2, 2010

Mr. KENNEDY. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize Summer Kennedy, my cousin, for her stewardship in the opening of the Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools Complex in Los Angeles, California on September 13, 2010. Named after U.S. Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Summer's father and my uncle, the schools are devoted to social justice. Summer's work on behalf of the young people of Los Angeles is simply remarkable.

On September 13, the six pilot schools that make up the Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools Complex began instructing students in grades kindergarten through 12th on its campus located in the Pico-Union/Korea Town neighborhood of Los Angeles. The schools are located on the site of the former Ambassador Hotel and because of the historic nature of the site, there were legal challenges to converting the site to a school. Community members and organizations, including RFK-12, came together to advocate for a local school. In 2005, the Los Angeles Unified School District School Board and Superintendent Roy Romer appointed the Robert F. Kennedy Commission to provide recommendations on how to memorialize Senator Kennedy's life. The commission was chaired by former California Supreme Court Justice Cruz Reynoso, and included a number of civic leaders.

The Commission's major recommendation called for a social justice theme to permeate the curriculum, extending from kindergarten through high school that would reflect Senator Kennedy's commitment throughout his public life.

The schools activities include: the creation of a foundation guided by an Advisory Committee that will help to fund social-justice related activities and act as a resource for the schools on establishing relationships with community service groups outside the school locally and in the larger world, a speakers program, a fellows program that will bring emerging and established leaders to the school, and the creation of a public park recalling the inspirational speeches by the Senator and others.

The pilot schools are innovative small schools that have charter-like autonomy over their budget, curriculum and assessment, governance, schedule and staffing, but are part of the public school system.

Summer has been instrumental in the improvement of public education in Los Angeles. I wish her all the best as she continues her important work on behalf of young people. She will continue to carry my own admiration, and that of all who have had the privilege to work with her.